

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2023

Remarks Prior to a Meeting With President Charles Yvon Michel of the European Council and President Ursula von der Leyen of the European Commission and an Exchange With Reporters

October 20, 2023

President Biden. Welcome. Madam President and Mr. President, it's great to see you both again. And our last summit, we committed to revitalizing the partnership between the EU and the United States. And over the last 2 years, we made good on that commitment, I think.

And we stood together to support the brave people of Ukraine in the face of Putin's aggression. And we stood together to tackle the economic challenges and established standards to guide our relationship with China. And we're standing together now to support Israel in the wake of Hamas's appalling terrorist attack.

And I just think that it's been one of the great pleasures of my Presidency to be able to work with both of you. And I mean that sincerely.

This morning, we're going to discuss the situation on both—the ground in both Israel and Ukraine. And I look forward to discussing how we're going to continue to seize the full potential of our partnership, including working together to drive the clean energy transition, to address unfairly traded steel and aluminum imports, to advance progress on critical mineral negotiations that's under—undergoing, and to manage a problem that also has a lot of promise as much as risk: artificial intelligence.

And so I want to thank you both for being here and for your unwavering commitment to our partnership.

And, President Michel, I'll turn it over to you.

President Michel. Thank you, dear President. Thank you for your warm welcome.

The EU and U.S., we share a special bond. We are more than close allies; we are close friends.

And I remember when you visited Brussels, you told us the moving story of your Uncle Frank, who served at the Battle of the Bulge in Belgium.

And I have also a personal story: My grandfather raised me with a strong admiration for your country, the United States, and for the sacrifices your young men and women made to liberate our part of Belgium.

Today, the world faces enormous challenges. And today, more than ever, the world needs a strong EU-U.S. alliance to tackle these challenges.

The conflict in the Middle East is a tragedy. So much suffering. So many heartbreaking images. I would like to thank you for your personal involvement, traveling to the region and working to have a positive influence.

We condemn the Hamas and its terrorist attack against Israel. Israel has the right to defend itself, and that must be done in line with international and humanitarian law.

We continue working day and night to help the most vulnerable in Palestine with their urgent needs and to foster the transition to relaunch the peace process based on a two-state solution. The EU was born as a peace project, so we continue to work tirelessly to help end the cycle of violence.

On European soil, Russia continues to rain missiles down on the people of Ukraine. And we'll stay focused on our strong support for the Ukrainian people and are grateful for American support for Ukraine. The EU, with our members states, we have provided over 82 billion euros of support, and this strong backing will continue for as long as it takes.

Finally, the U.N., the EU, and U.S., we are forging a united front to tackle all these challenges head on, working together and supporting each other. It's our—in our mutual interest, and it is good for the world. That's why we are working in the EU to try to build robust economies underpinned by robust industries that can prosper in the level playing field that we both value.

The EU and U.S., we have a powerful trade relationship. And sometimes we have our differences, but that's why we are here: to cooperate, to find solutions that work for businesses and workers on both sides of the Atlantic.

So we have a lot to discuss. We'll do it honestly, like good friends do.

Thank you.

President Biden. Well, we always have.

And by the way, I told you about my uncle who won the Purple Heart for the Battle of the Bulge and—my father's younger brother.

My father came to me after I was a Senator, and he said, "You know"—his brother's name was Frank. And he said: "You know, Uncle Frank never got his Purple Heart. Do you think you could find out about that?" I was a Senator, so I found out. And sure enough, he did.

So I got a Purple Heart for him, and I invited him over to the house with the family to give it to him. He said, "I don't want the damn thing." I said, "Why?" He said: "The others died. I didn't. I don't want it." And an awful lot of brave people died, as well, there.

Ursula, the—Madam—[*laughter*—Madam President, the floor is yours.

President von der Leyen. Thank you very much. Speaking of personal transatlantic bonds, my great-grandmother came from South Carolina, and she moved the other way around to Germany——

President Biden. You all—[*inaudible*]. [*Laughter*]

President von der Leyen. ——married my great-grandfather. And to make a longer story short, today, I am the proud mother of two American citizens. And as those citizens—American citizens—have already children again, I'm also the proud grandmother of one American citizen. So we have a lot of personal bonds that are transatlantic.

Mr. President, I want to thank you for your remarkable visit to Israel. It is important to show solidarity with Israel, victim of the worst attack since the Shoah. Israel has the right of—to self-defense in line with humanitarian law.

I was in Israel, too, exactly 1 week ago. I went to the kibbutz Kfar Aza. What I saw was barbaric. The impact on the Israeli society cannot be emphasized enough.

We stand with Israel and against terror.

At the same time, Palestinians also suffer from Hamas terroristic actions. As we have both said, Hamas does not represent the Palestinian people. The United States and the European Union are both significantly increasing their humanitarian aid to civilians in Gaza. This is crucial, in view of their suffering.

And we must also work actively to prevent regional escalation. I am particularly concerned about Iran and its proxies. We have all seen the incidents involving missiles and drones from Yemen potentially targeting Israel. No one should take advantage of this situation.

And let me also stress: The events in the Middle East will not distract us from our rock-solid support to Ukraine. We have already provided assistance worth almost \$90 billion to Ukraine. This includes financial support to keep the state and the economy running, military equipment, humanitarian aid, and support for 4 million refugees. In the next 4 years, we aim to provide another 50 billion euros. Important is for Ukraine to have predictability.

We are also making sure, through our joint actions, that Russia's ability to wage war is hampered as much as possible and that those responsible are held accountable.

Putin will ultimately fail. He is running Russia into the ground.

These conflicts show democracies must stand together. This is also true when it comes to other big challenges like fighting climate change, fostering smart investment in emerging economies, or upholding our rules-based international order.

So I'm very happy to be here today to discuss all these topics with our friend, the United States.

President Biden. We're happy to have you here——

President von der Leyen. Thank you.

President Biden. ——all of you.

Thank you, press.

Humanitarian Assistance for Gaza

Q. Mr. President, what is happening with the trucks for Gaza? Are you confident these supplies will get into Gaza?

Q. What do you make of that, Mr. President?

Q. Mr. President, the aid for Gaza—are you confident——

Q. What do you make of that?

President Biden. I'll answer that one question and then say goodbye to all of you.

I believe you'll see that I got a commitment from the Israelis and the President of Egypt that the crossing would be open. The highway had to be repaved because it was very bad—in very bad shape. And I believe that within the next 24 to 48 hours, the first 20 trucks will come across with aid.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:40 p.m. in the Cabinet Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to President Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin of Russia; and President Abdelfattah Said Elsisy of Egypt.

Categories: Interviews With the News Media : Exchanges with reporters, White House; Meetings With Foreign Leaders and International Officials : European Council President Michel and European Commission President von der Leyen.

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